

Qs & As on the Draft BLM Planning Guidance

1. What is the BLM's draft planning guidance?

The draft planning guidance consists of an updated BLM policy manual on planning and a newly created handbook that provides guidance to field offices for preparing and amending land use plans, including Resource Management Plans (RMPs) and Management Framework Plans (MFPs) at the local and regional levels. It also provides guidance for preparing and updating implementation plans.

This new guidance, when finalized, will replace the 1600 series of the BLM Manual with the exception of Manual Section 1613 - Areas of Critical Environmental Concern and Handbook H-1624-1 Planning for Fluid Minerals.

The Federal Land Policy and Management Act of 1976 (FLPMA) requires that BLM prepare land use plans and that BLM lands be managed under the principles of multiple use and sustained yield (FLPMA, Sec. 102 (a) (7)); in a manner that will protect the quality of scientific, scenic, historical, ecological, environmental, air and atmospheric, water resource, and archaeological values; that, where appropriate, will preserve and protect certain public lands in their natural condition; that will provide food and habitat for fish and wildlife and domestic animals; and that will provide for outdoor recreation and human occupancy and use (FLPMA, Sec. 102 (a) (8)); and in a manner that recognizes the Nation's need for domestic sources of minerals, food, timber, and fiber from the public lands (FLPMA, Sec. 102 (a) (12)).

2. Why is the BLM issuing this guidance?

There are more complex demands made of the public lands today, than when the BLM planning regulations and original guidance were issued in the 1980s. There are also new circumstances, such as increasing population growth near public lands in the West, and new data now available, such as new information on the condition and trend of vegetation, soil, and water resources. Many of the existing land use plans are aging and need to be updated to address these new circumstances and incorporate new data. This guidance specifically addresses how to update existing plans and to create the next generation of plans.

3. Is it a proposed rule?

No. The new guidance works within the framework of the existing planning regulations at 43 CFR 1600. It does not, in any way, revise BLM's existing planning regulations.

4. How does it differ from the BLM's previous guidance?

In recent years, the BLM has sought to engage and also participate with other landowners and jurisdictions in developing land use plans which address management of natural resource values and uses on a watershed or ecosystem basis, rather than on a strictly jurisdictional basis. The new planning guidance emphasizes the need to plan in conjunction with local communities and in partnership with other planning jurisdictions. As the existing guidance did not address the BLM's role in these types of multi-jurisdictional plans, there is a need for the policy guidance provided in the planning manual.

The new guidance is also less process oriented, meaning there is more flexibility in the planning process. Specifically, the new planning guidance highlights the minimum requirements for planning, rather than being prescriptive. It builds on field experience gained in implementing the 1983 planning regulations (43 CFR 1600) and subsequent manual guidance.

5. How will it affect the BLM's planning process?

The basic required elements of the land use planning process and time lines will remain the same, however there will be greater emphasis on public involvement, collaborative planning, multi-jurisdictional planning with other governmental entities, and on updating existing plans.

The new planning guidance:

1. Encourages planning on a variety of scales, including both traditional RMPs at the local level and larger regional-level plans, and combinations of these across different land ownerships and jurisdictions;
2. Encourages greater public participation throughout the planning process and facilitates multi-jurisdictional planning;
3. Clarifies the relationship between land use plans and implementation plans;
4. Provides the minimum procedural requirements for completing land use plans and implementation plans;
5. Clarifies the relationships between land use plan and NEPA requirements; and
6. Addresses new requirements and approaches for managing public lands or resources; and
7. Addresses the consideration of new information and circumstances, such as new listings of threatened and endangered species, and new requirements and standards for the protection of air and water quality.

6. Will the guidance make it easier to update land use plans?

Yes. Land use plans will be easier to update because the guidance provides the most comprehensive direction to date specifically meant for updating existing plans to be concordant with current and future conditions and to incorporate new data.

7. How will the guidance help managers update BLM's aging planning base?

The guidance contains procedures for considering new information and making necessary revisions or amendments to land use plans. Field managers will be able to update existing plans through a specific set of directions that define *what* new elements need to be addressed and *how* to go about analyzing those elements to see if changes need to be made.

Plans can be updated by amendment or revision. Plans needing amendment may be grouped geographically into regional level plans or by type of decision in the same amendment process. Similarly, one amendment process may amend the same or related decisions in more than one land use plan. In reaching a decision to amend a land use plan, BLM must not only consider the resources, but also other workload priorities, budgetary constraints and staff capabilities. Revisions, which involve preparation of a new Resource Management Plan (RMP) to replace an existing plan, are necessary if monitoring and evaluation findings, new data, new or revised policy, or changes in circumstances indicate that decisions for an entire plan or portion of the plan no longer serve as a useful guide for resource management. Plan revisions are prepared using the same procedures and documentation as for new plans.

The guidance also contains procedures for completing a land use plan amendment in conjunction with the analysis required for a specific implementation action (e.g. a land exchange) when the proposed implementation action does not conform with the land use plan.

8. How will this guidance improve customer service?

Customer service will be improved through greater opportunity for the public to participate in planning processes and for closer coordination between BLM and other jurisdictions, such as tribal, State or local governments, which are also responsible for land use planning.

9. Will this guidance make planning more costly?

Costs associated with land use planning are dependent on the scope of the effort and the breadth of the issues to be addressed in the planning effort. It is anticipated that overall cost to BLM and other jurisdictions may decrease through collaborative and multi-jurisdictional planning because of shared data collection and skills. Since each effort will be unique, costs may decline for some efforts while increasing for others.

10. Has the BLM coordinated with the Forest Service in developing the planning guidance?

Over the last several years, the BLM and Forest Service have coordinated on approaches to land use planning. Unlike the BLM, the Forest Service is in the process of developing new regulations on land use planning. On October 5, 1999, the Forest Service issued a proposed rule to guide

land and resource management planning for the National Forest System. Both agencies are united in their efforts to simplify, clarify and otherwise improve the planning process and to strengthen collaborative relationships with the public and other government entities.

11. Does this guidance reflect input from the public?

The new planning guidance is the culmination of needs expressed by local managers who work with the public every day, as well as comments gathered in scoping meetings in 1998. BLM is currently seeking feedback from the public, tribal, state and local entities as well as other Federal agencies for 45 days. Public comments will be considered in development of the final version of the planning guidance. A public record and summary of how comments were addressed will be available at the BLM Washington Office for review upon request.

12. Will the BLM be conducting public outreach?

The BLM will conduct outreach efforts at field offices in order to inform the public of the 45-day public review period, which will end on July 10. Anyone interested in the planning guidance should contact their local field office.

13. How may I obtain a copy of the planning guidance?

The proposed planning guidance can be accessed on the BLM's Internet Home Page at <http://www.blm.gov> Paper copies may be obtained from your nearest BLM State of Field Office or from BLM's Planning, Assessment, and Community Support Group (WO-210), 1849 C Street, N.W., Washington, D.C. 20240-0001.

14. Is this guidance final?

No, before it is finalized, the guidance will be subjected to review by the public, other governmental entities and agencies, and throughout BLM.

15. How may I submit comments?

Written comments on the proposed guidance should be sent to Ted Milesnick, Bureau of Land Management, Planning, Assessment and Community Support Group (WO-210), 1849 C Street, N.W., Washington, D.C. 20240-0001. E-mail comments from non-BLM individuals and organizations should be sent to the BLM Washington Office at <http://www.wo210@blm.gov>.

16. How may I find out more about it?

If you would like more information, please contact either the planning coordinator at the BLM State Office nearest you or Ted Milesnick, Senior Specialist for Planning, Bureau of Land Management, Planning, Assessment and Community Support Group (WO-210) 1849 C Street, N.W., Washington, D.C. 20240-0001; phone number: (202) 452-7727.

17. When will this guidance go into effect?

The guidance is expected to be released in final by September 30, 2000 and become effective immediately thereafter.